The Top Runners' Quarterly

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The Dioscuri Project

by Douglas "Rabbi Small" Kaufman
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Greetings, **Netrunner** aficionados. A team of dedicated players has been hard at work over the past year (well, we talked about it a little during the summer, actually) creating 6 Corp and 6 Runner meta-cards we've dubbed "Dioscuri." These meta-cards are just like the **Magic: The Gathering** *Vanguard*™ cards—they are dealt, one to each side, before the game begins, and grant an ongoing power or ability during the game. They are supposedly balanced so that they could be used with a sealed or constructed deck.

Herewith we present the first Corp and Runner Dioscuri cards. We'd like for you, the reader, to try playing games with these cards. Use them with sealed decks. Use them with constructed decks. Try playing with just one side having a Dioscuri power. Play with different values from the ones given here (larger starting hand, fewer AI counters—whatever you think might be interesting).

There were some legal questions at one point, about keeping the Dioscuri cards out of publication to avoid issues with Wizards being able to print them someday in their magazine—but at this point I think such issues are irrelevant. So here are the first two cards. Play them, enjoy them, pass the information on to your **Netrunner** friends.

What We Want From You

First, have fun with them—it's something new for **Netrunner**, and that's a rare thing these days! Second, please give feedback. Send email to Doug Kaufman, the project leader, at

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or send an "email to the editor," at

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for public discussion here within the *Top Runners' Quarterly*. What sort of feedback? Well, in a word, everything. Are the cards balanced? Are they fun? What changes would you suggest to make them more so? Is the wording clear? Subject to abuse? How could it be changed? Do you like the names? Quotes? Do you have ideas for other Dioscuri (especially Runner!) that these spark? Get involved!

In the next issue of the TRQ, we'll print the next Corp and Runner Dioscuri cards. Then things will get geometrically more interesting!

Thanks for your interest,
Doug Kaufman

State of the Corp—December 2000

by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes
gadget@wizards.com

Two words: Systematic Layoffs.

That's the grim news out of HQ this month, as declining sales caused Hasbro to reduce its staff across all divisions (including WotC) and sell some properties. While I survived the cuts, this is the death knell for any official Corporate support for the "classic" games—especially with the departure of Peter Adkison, who was passionate about supporting customers of those lines.

However.

There have been numerous inquiries about outside sublicensing of the game, which I hope will be appealing to R. Talsorian (they have the final say). Wizards is quite willing to grant permissions, and I still hold out hope that a small independent publisher may be able to keep this great game alive.

As always, I have some supplies to help support players (including rulebooks for "Neal," if you're reading this) and will keep providing what I can as long as they hold out.

What with the new century just around the corner, we are entering the Cyberpunk world. Seems like a good time for international competition. World Domination, anyone?

Best wishes and hopeful thoughts for this holiday season and the coming new year!

— "Jen of Arc"

The Dioscuri (Part One)

Psychic AI, Inc. – Dioscuri—Corp

At the start of the game, put 6 Psi counters on Psychic AI, Inc.
Psi Counter: Lower a die roll made by either player by 1. A die roll of less than "1" is treated as a 1. You may use this ability after the die is rolled, but you may only use 1 Psi counter per die roll to be affected.
Psi Counter: Gain 2 bits. You may use this ability only once per turn, and only during your own turn.

Starting Hand: 4
Starting Bits: 3

"But the Devil does dice with Einstein."

Infinite Fax Loop - Dioscuri—Runner

Infinite Fax Loop starts the games with 2 Paperwork counters.
Paperwork Counter: Prevent an advancement counter from being added to any card. The number of advancement counters being added to the node or agenda cannot be reduced below 1 in this way.
3 Paperwork Counters, A: Corp may not advance any cards during its next turn.
Whenever the corp successfully adds multiple advancement counters to an agenda in a single turn, add one Paperwork counter to Infinite Fax Loop.

"You just tape the ends together, and it faxes forever. Serves 'em right for still using paper!"

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#8: Big Dig

by Jens Kreutzer (with support by Holger Janssen)
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Normally, it is always worth an action to run R&D and check the top for an agenda that's ripe for plucking. R&D comprises those cards that are least controllable by the Corp, barring card effects like Strategic Planning Group or Planning Consultants. If the Corp gets nervous each time the Runner looks at an R&D card, it gets downright paranoid about heavy-caliber Runner tech like Rush Hour. The Runner strategy taking this approach to its limits is called, appropriately enough, "Big Dig"—after a somewhat slow buildup, it simply accesses everything that's left in R&D in one fell swoop, which normally yields enough agenda points for the win.

The *Proteus*™ expansion supplied the last of the three tools needed for an effective Big Dig approach: a 'breaker suite sure to breach R&D ice at the critical moment, a powerful tool for multiple card access (*Proteus*' R&D Mole, possibly in combination with Rush Hour), and vast amounts of bits to power the first two. And so, as early as November 17, 1996, the following stack by Chris Patterson was posted to the Netrunner-l newsgroup:

7	**Top Runners' Conference**
4	**Loan from Chiba**
1	**misc.for-sale**
8	**Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood**
2	**MIT West Tier**
3	**Militech MRAM Chip**
1	**Codecracker**
1	**Pile Driver**
1	**AI Boon**
1	**Enterprise, Inc., Shields**
1	**Mouse**
10	**R&D Mole**
1	**Mercenary Subcontract**
1	**The Deck**
2	**Time to Collect**
3	**Fall Guy**

The stack's first goal is to install as many Top Runners' Conferences as possible, and fast. They quickly reach the Runner's hands with the powerful draw engine of Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood and Militech MRAM Chips, yielding bits every turn once they have been installed. Since this deck makes only one run, the Conferences' restriction (trash upon making a run) is of no importance. Loan from Chiba can be used as a fast bit influx for installing expensive cards like AI Boon or The Deck, but it is better to save Loans for the last turn, since they interact with Top Runners' Conference in a counterproductive way. The card best played immediately before the final run is misc.for-sale, cashing in the Conferences. Chris revealed that he created bit amounts in the realm of three digits with this engine.

Just as important is getting the setup ('breakers, some defense if deemed necessary, and, most importantly, all the R&D Moles alongside a Mercenary Subcontract) on the table as fast as possible. Although the draw engine helps, installing three 'breakers, ten R&D Moles, and a Mercenary Subcontract still takes 14 actions—being a bit on the slow side is the weak spot of Big Dig. After all of this preparation is complete, however, its big moment comes—unless the Corporation has won by then, of course. After three more actions of preparing or bit-gaining (Loan from Chiba and/or misc.for-sale), the Runner assaults R&D. The ice should not seriously impede a breach by now, and once inside, the Runner spends all leftover bits on R&D Moles. Assuming a starting Corp deck of 45 cards, minus five cards drawn at the start of the game, minus perhaps eight or ten more drawn during the elapsed turns, that leaves 30 to 35 cards in R&D. Ten R&D Moles accesses 21 cards, which falls little short of rifling through what is left, but the Moles can be used one at a time while accessing cards, saving bits for a possible use of Mercenary Subcontract if not enough agenda points for winning turn up. In that event, the Mercenaries put everything accessed into the Archives, severely pushing the Corp to the point of losing through R&D depletion. Also very important are Enterprise, Inc., Shields to guard against an R&D bristling with Setup! or TRAP!.

As Chris pointed out, a Corporation that is caught unawares by this strategy will be very unhappy und surprised indeed, as it watches the Runner's agenda score go from 0 to 7 in a single action. His other assertion, that the Corp cannot do much about it even if it sees it coming, might have been true in 1996—but times have changed. Nowadays, a Corp player need only see one Top Runners' Conference played in the Runner's first turn to know exactly what kind of general approach is to be expected and adjust to it. With only minimal ice (or even in the open), the Corp does nothing but draw cards, create bits, and advance agendas, speeding towards victory on overdrive. If this taunts the Runner into running, that's just fine with the Corp, since it neatly disposes of all installed Top Runners' Conferences, crippling the Runner's bit pool. If not, the Corp will usually outrace the Runner to 7 agenda points. In any case, it becomes an exciting race between the two players, albeit with little in terms of interaction.

Chris Patterson identified several natural enemies of Big Dig: speed advance, in which the Corp has no trouble outracing the Runner with time to spare, and the much-played City Surveillance, which presents a dire threat to a draw engine relying on Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood. Chris's deck includes Mouse to identify speed decks early on (presumably agendas like Tycho or fast-advancement nodes), but in today's tournament environment, this seems a waste of actions. Speed decks use powerful bit-gainers and fast-advancement operations in most cases, which cannot be detected by Mouse. It could be used to spot City Surveillances, however. Chris joked in his mail, "To fight City Surveillance, I just concede." Not far from the bitter truth—the Runner can do nothing but take bits until he or she has enough to pay off City Surveillance before starting to use Bodyweight™. Otherwise, the Runner will be a sitting duck for incoming meat damage, or the trashing of vital resources. The only other tag danger would be from Underworld Mole, against which the Fall Guys and Time to Collect give the Runner a fighting chance.

Much has changed since Chris posted his deck to the list, most notably the additional cards offered by *Classic*™ spicing up the environment. With these and the experience of years of playing Constructed tournaments added to the bill, the Big Dig has much more potential, in terms of both speed and impact. On the other hand, the new Restricted environment has ousted Enterprise, Inc., Shields, so Runners should try to make do without them.

The first likely idea for improvement is substituting *Classic*'s Rent-I-Con for Chris's original 'breaker suite (he would have done well in choosing Bartmoss Memorial Icebreaker/Umbrella Policy in the first place). It saves actions otherwise used for installation, is not too expensive in light of the powerful bit engine, and really shines since the Runner can ignore

its major drawback: If only one run is ever made during the game, Rent-I-Con's self-trashing only adds to the show.

The greatest forte of the Big Dig is its finality: If the whole of R&D is trashed with Mercenary Subcontract, the Corp loses at the start of its next turn, no matter how many agenda points the Runner has liberated by then. As shown by the calculation above, Chris's stack did not consistently access all that remains of R&D, sometimes leaving a number of cards behind. Assuming a standard 45-card Corp deck, the Big Dig has to make sure that if the Corp allows the Runner to make that one big run, it loses. Therefore, it needs more accessing power, which is provided by more R&D Moles and one Rush Hour. An improved, modernized Big Dig might look as follows:

10	**Top Runners' Conference**
2	**Loan from Chiba**
1	**misc.for-sale**
10	**Bodyweight™ Synthetic Blood**
5	**Militech MRAM Chip**
2	**Rent-I-Con**
1	**Rush Hour**
13	**R&D Mole**
1	**Mercenary Subcontract**

This deck assumes a game that lasts no longer than ten turns. At that point, there are at most 30 cards left in R&D, assuming a 45-card deck and one mandatory draw per turn only. The Rush Hour and R&D Moles allow the Runner to access exactly 30 cards, guaranteeing that he or she will see the remainder of R&D. Installing all the Top Runners' Conferences (TRCs), two Loans from Chiba, two Militech MRAM Chips, one Rent-I-Con, 13 R&D Moles and the Mercenary Subcontract, plus playing eight Bodyweights, misc.for-sale and Rush Hour, takes exactly 39 actions, or ten turns with one action to spare, should you have to draw a single card when no Bodyweight turns up. It is crucial that the Bodyweights and MRAM Chips show up in time, but since there are a lot of them in the stack, you have a good chance of never wasting actions to draw single cards or having to throw away cards vital to the strategy.

At first, install as many TRCs as possible, since the earlier they are installed, the more bits will they yield on the whole. Next priority is getting one or two MRAM Chips into play. Then you can start installing whatever turns up, preferring TRCs over Moles and the Subcontract. Save Rent-I-Con for the penultimate turn, lest the Corp realize what ice would make you pay the most. You will probably have to discard the odd card, so look at the game situation: If the Corp draws lots of cards, you don't need so many R&D Moles (though this leaves no doubt about your intentions); if you drew and installed many TRCs at the start of the game, you can discard later ones easily. The default choice for discard would be the three superfluous MRAM Chips, or Bodyweights, if you have a handful of them. Discarding one of the Rent-I-Cons gives away much to the Corp, although less so than the R&D Moles.

When everything is in place, the final turn should look like this: Play misc.for-sale, selling off all TRCs and MRAM Chips, then two Loans, and finally Rush Hour. After breaching R&D ice (and hopefully surviving any nasty upgrades), pop the R&D Moles one at a time. As long as you don't hit any ambushes and your bits don't run out, keep doing this until R&D is looted. Then, if necessary, send in the Mercenaries for the *coup de grace*. This should work—unless you hit Net and brain damage cards, in which case all you can do is pray.

Ten turns is a lot of time for the Corp to glide to victory, of course. If you see that impending danger, take the risk of a hip-shot run over not running at all. It's not that hard to make the big run during turn nine, dispensing with say, two TRCs and two Moles, as well as one Bodyweight, since the Corp is likely to draw lots of cards seeking agenda anyway. Depending on what you draw, runs by turn six or seven are not a bad choice, either—even though you probably won't access R&D completely, you might get enough AP for the win. The two Rent-I-Cons increase the chances of having one in the event an early run is necessary.

This streamlined version of the Big Dig comes with a steep cost: even greater vulnerability to Tag 'n' Bag and ambushes. Though you might survive an Underworld Mole, City Surveillance is still the card you'd rather not see on the table. Without Enterprise, Inc., Shields, ambushes have become very dangerous. The cards you have in your hand when making that final run won't be much of a damage buffer, so beware. Skullcap or Emergency Self-Construct might not be worth the effort, but Holger Janssen advises using Weefle Initiation instead of Rush Hour to be on the safe side. If you don't have enough TRCs, substitute Score! or the like, though this is hard on your bit supply. On the other hand, if you're not shy of a little brain damage, Holger names Do the 'Drine as an effective alternative for bit-gaining. He also points to the possibilities of Promises, Promises in the Big Dig context (especially cool if you're up against a Corp that just uses three Political Overthrows). Try it out and play with whatever works best for you. Since it does not involve much interaction, Big Dig is perhaps not that much fun to play in the long run (pun intended), but everybody should try it out once for the sheer pleasure of digging away!

Interview with Byron "Neal" Massey

by Jens Kreutzer
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Byron, as the author of "Neal's Last Words", you are quite famous among Netrunners. Could you please tell our readers a bit about yourself?

A lot of this is probably boring, but here it is. I live in Coos Bay, on the West Coast of the U. S. in the state of Oregon. The town is actually on most maps, it has a really good port, the only decent one between Seattle and San Francisco. I just turned 33 and I have a 4-year-old daughter, whom I regrettably do not live with. My brother is a professor of Computer Science at Portland State University, and my sister takes care of her three children. My cousin is Rob, of Rob's Netrunner Node. He's the whole reason I started playing **Netrunner**, and I want to thank him for the good times. My main profession now is running my game store, The Game Hen. My Bachelor's degree is Physics and my Masters is Education, and I taught high school for five years, and a little junior college. I still do some tutoring, and I've also done some computer work.

*What is the status of **Netrunner** in the area you're living in?*

Completely, totally dead. I can't get any starter decks for the store, and that's an impossible barrier for any game to overcome. I get an occasional pick-up game from customers, but that's it. I do miss the game a lot. Near the end, the only real ground to cover was designing constructed decks, but that's an intellectual exercise, not a game. I enjoyed it, but I really miss those desperate runs and diabolic defenses that come in face-to-face, interactive matches.

Your "Last Words" (`http://gamehen.com/Neal/index.html`*) are among the best essays ever written on* ***Netrunner****, in my humble opinion. Though some of them can still be found in the Net, is there any chance to conserve the rest for posterity as well?*

Thanks! Frisco is still the Content King, in my opinion. Part of that is his deep perception, part his writing style, and part because he did his work when the game was still fresh. I've got them all on hard disk here at home. My original intention was to reformat the HTML and put them up on The Game Hen's web pages. After reading them, though, I realized how much had changed since they had been written. There are rants about the DCI, strategy articles written soon after *Proteus*™ was released, etc. I did put up a few of the old columns that were less technical. Tournament reports, stuff like that. My suggestions for tourney scoring, new variants, and the rest are essentially obsolete. I should say that I've never really lost my enthusiasm for the preprogrammed stack variant. You can build your deck however you want, then put your cards in any order you want before you start the game. I've played it a little (not recently) and I really like it a lot. There are some problem cards that shouldn't be used, but you discover them quickly when playing this variant. If **Netrunner** has finally left you bored stiff, this is a great way to get more good gaming from your cards.

Though you've announced that you have ended your personal history of ***Netrunner*** *authorship, is there any chance of you returning to the flock as a writer?*

I had such a bad experience with the French *Black Ops* magazine. I won't go into a lot of detail, but I did make significant contributions to their early issues and have never received a penny for them. Having that background, I'd write for anyone who agreed to front some money or had a good history of payment. Unfortunately, I don't think anyone like that exists. I tried to get a piece in *Inquest* when *Classic* was about to be released, but they weren't interested at all. There's just no market for **Netrunner** writing, because there's so little **Netrunner** being played. I get all gloomy whenever I think about it. Next question. ☺

If I understand it right, this sad incident was at least in part responsible for your skepticism and at times (pardon me) somewhat aloof attitude toward ***Netrunner*** *activities. Did I get this right, and would you like to elaborate on this?*

At any point, if they had just said, "We're broke right now," it would have been okay. Instead, they kept telling me, "The check is in the mail." A year later, I got a little upset about it. There's no shame in trying a good idea (*Black Ops*) and having it fail. But there is a lot of shame in breaking promises and lying.

In retrospective, much of your skepticism seems entirely justified—is there anything you would like to say about the "sad story of a fine game" in general terms?

Netrunner, like so many other CCGs of its time, died due to massive expectations in a collapsing market. In most companies, protecting a large investment of time and money would be a priority. Sadly for **Netrunner**, WotC could just watch it die while enjoying the income from **Magic®**. With a lot of work, **Netrunner** could still be a popular, viable game. But why would WotC do that work when the **Magic** dollars come in so easily? That's the sad truth, as I see it. The Hasbro buyout was just the final step along a road that was essentially predetermined when the CCG market collapsed. WotC has been unable to produce any successful new products since **Magic** first hit the market. A game company has a hard time growing, or even surviving, without a successful effort every 2 to 3 years. The new **Dungeons and Dragons®** material is very popular, and it shows what new capital can do after acquiring a debt-ridden company (TSR). Between the ongoing **Magic** sales and the new **D&D®** material, WotC will be a productive part of Hasbro for a long time. Unfortunately, tiny niche games like **Netrunner** won't ever be part of their vast strategic plans. This is a good time to point out the monumental effort of Jennifer Clarke Wilkes. I have no idea how she got *Classic* published in that environment. Despite the zero-marketing, poorly-named effort (beyond even her influence), it was a remarkable accomplishment.

What is your favorite recollection when you think about the time you dedicated to ***Netrunner****?*

The year I held the Northwest Championships was a great one. I didn't play at all, since I was running the tournament, and that sucked, but I did get pick-up games of sealed-deck against Jim McCoy and Frisco Del Rosario. I beat them both! That was a great feeling, only because I hold their play in such high regard. Of course, they were probably very tired after a long day at the tournament . . .. Scott Dickie came out and visited on vacation, it was great to spend real time with a player like him. That was several years ago, but those are the kind of experiences that tend to stick with me. Basically, I remember the people and the fun more than the actual sequences of cards I played. Working with my brother, Dennis Duncan, and cousin Rob was a fantastic experience. Visiting Frisco in San Francisco. Playing Byron Bailey in Sealed deck and realizing just how good he really was.

Any favourite strategies/decks?

I'm still partial to the Poisoned Water Supply/Preying Mantis deck for Constructed play. It takes a lot of mental gymnastics to make it work, although it's not interactive at all, which sucks. I think I like it because you can crush an opponent, but it's not all that easy. You'll kill yourself if you're careless. I also miss Greyhound Demolition Derby. That idea was spawned after Northwest Champion Chris Phillips beat the field to pieces with a now-illegal Precision Bribery/Time to Collect stack. It was fun to show a guy that taking deck lists off the net wasn't as important as designing your own. My favorite Corporations are all designed by Erwin Wagner, of The TRAP! He can do more with Pacifica Regional AI than anyone on the planet. His decks take some planning and strategy, too. If played correctly, you often finish the game with an infinite turn (paradox?). That's pretty incredible.

How do you see the Constructed tourney environment at the time?

I wish I had more good things to say about *Classic*. There are some very interesting, useful cards in the set—just not enough. The three-year delay between the design of the set and its release was fatal. The game changed so much during that time. No one could have expected those old cards to make sense after such a long incubation. Learning to be a successful Runner is a really hard job. The personal satisfaction makes it a worthwhile effort, though. Starting with *Proteus*, I think it's easy to see the design team working toward making it easier for the Runner. That might have been a smart marketing move, but it hurt the best part of the game. *Classic* made this problem worse, in many ways. All the old debates about banning cards, restricting them, or new limitations on duplicates, were spawned by the more basic problem of trying to make the Runner's job easier. The original edition of **Netrunner**, v1.0, is a pinnacle of game design. It's just about perfect.

Everything after it was a step down, although that isn't the reason the game died. This is so gloomy. Next.

*At various times, there have been people who claimed that "**Netrunner** was solved"; i. e., the "strongest" or "most broken" strategies had been found. Do you think that such a state has been reached by now (the Preying Mantis/Poisoned Water Supply stack comes to mind), or do you believe that such as state is indeed possible?*

Oh, it's impossible, but you can get close enough to ruin the fun. I think that cards like Loan from Chiba, etc., force Corporations to play with very specific countermeasures, which, in turn force stacks to include certain defenses, which, in turn, force Corps to take . . . etc., etc., etc. Over the years, I've proposed all kinds of solutions to this problem. No solution is bulletproof, though. **Magic** is finally escaping this problem by releasing very good sets of new cards. Of course, this is happening after five years or so. **Netrunner** never had a chance to reach that critical mass of card choices. For me, there are two solutions. One is to play Sealed-deck, which ruins the fun of deck design, but gives a great experience across the table. The other is to play a variant, like the one I described above. I might change my mind on this tomorrow. I waver from day-to-day on the best way to enjoy my **Netrunner** collection.

*Do you see any chance of a non-WotC entity buying the rights of and reprinting **Netrunner**? The cards in stock finally seem to be running low at Wizard's, and they are actually becoming scarce, it seems.*

None. Hasbro has essentially achieved a monopoly on CCGs. All the other companies, together, are a tiny fraction of their sales. The selling price of **Netrunner** would be pitiful, by the budget standards of Hasbro. They really don't need the money. And there would be that tiny, tiny risk of another company turning **Netrunner** into a major competitor. The risk to Hasbro is bigger than the reward. It's too bad that a great designer like Richard Garfield ended up in this situation. As far as I know, being a hardball capitalist is not his nature. Nonetheless, his company ended up being a branch of a giant corporation. Unlike Richard, they aren't looking for beauty in game design. They're looking for large profits.

*Is there still **Netrunner** action to be had at your game store, The Game Hen? Do you still have cards for sale?*

As I mentioned, the game is more-or-less deceased. I still have a **Netrunner** logo hanging above the cash register. And I still have a huge pile of cards that would undoubtedly be a great thing for someone else to enjoy. If anyone is interested in getting specific cards, they should go to gamehen.com and call the toll-free number, or email me. I still have some *Classic* and v1.0 boosters, too. We need rulebooks, we need starter decks, we need mild amounts of advertising. I don't see those things on the horizon.

One more thing: I know lots of people are capable of playing **Netrunner** on Apprentice. I can't run Apprentice on my Macintosh (nor is there a Linux version). I think **Netrunner** would still be played frequently if there was a cross-platform method for playing on computers. Obviously, no one is going to be paid to write this code. But it should be written, just the same. NetNetrunner was a good first effort, and a modern, well-written version would be a great thing. I see this is as the only realistic way for **Netrunner** to survive in any form. But it requires a hero, someone willing to code the thing for free.

Any last words? ☺

A huge number of people have tolerated my sharpness for many years, in conjunction with **Netrunner**. Thanks to all of them, and to each and every opponent, correspondent, and confidant that I met in Wilderspace. **Netrunner** was something special. It brought some of the best minds in gaming together, and gave them a challenge. Despite my sadness at the demise of this great game, I'll always value those memories and the people who I shared them with.

Thank you very much for your time.

Did You Know?

Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection

#8: Shakespeare in the 'Net

by Jens Kreutzer, M. A.
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Act the First

Assumed to be the greatest playwright of all times by quite a few people, the Bard, the Swan of Avon, better known as William Shakespeare, has sustained his fame for some 400 years now, and it is unlikely that he will pass into oblivion anytime soon. That said, it is not too big a surprise to discover that he has found his way into the not-too-distant future world of **Netrunner** as well. With the Renaissance-like figures pictured on the artwork of Riddler as a backdrop, we can set the stage for Shakespeare's cameo appearance. Dressed in the Elizabethan attire of Shakespeare's times, the "Riddlers" seem as if they might pull a skull out of their pockets at any time and start off reciting the *Hamlet* soliloquy.

Act the Second

We go *in medias res* with the flavor text of Asp, taken from Shakespeare's *King Lear* with a few modifications. On the card, it says, "Oh how sharper than a serpent's tooth is one of these suckers clamped onto the boot sector of a drive!" Having Asp make the Runner pay a bit and miss an action to get rid of the "serpent's tooth" might be harsh, but King Lear has sorrows of his own. In Act I, Scene 4, he laments the thankless behavior of one of his daughters, invoking Nature to curse her, so that she may experience the same insults he had to suffer from her:

Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase;
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen; that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatured torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks;
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt; that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child!

We all know that Lear turns mad in the end, of course.

Act the Third

On we go, traversing "this wooden O", the round stagehouse of Elizabethan London (or rather, "this criss-cross'd matrix"?), only to find us in the middle of historical Verona, where tempers run

high as two houses, the Capulets and the Montagues, fight it out over *Romeo and Juliet*. Filled with a deep hatred for each other, the families only realize their folly when the two young lovers have died. Earlier, when a fight in the street is about to claim him as a first victim, the wounded Mercutio curses in Act III, Scene 1:

Help me into some house, Benvolio,
Or I shall faint. A plague o' both your houses!
They have made worms' meat of me: I have it,
And soundly too:—your houses!

Much evil could have been prevented if the families' hot-blooded swashbucklers had been glued to the spot instead: "Epoxy both your houses!", it says in the flavor text of *Classic*'s Superglue, epoxy being a key component of modern industrial glues. The handle "Bard" of the Runner quoted on the card only makes the reference (and reverence for Shakespeare in the cyber age) more obvious.

Act the Fourth and Act the Fifth

As in any classic Shakespeare play, there should be five acts to this article—unfortunately, they must be put off until future expansions (as you have guessed, this is not a comedy, nor a history, but a tragedy) are released to pay the Bard his due. ☺

Visiting the Tokyo City Grid

by Jens Kreutzer
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This is an editorial as well as a report, in a way, since I am directly involved in it all—it is also the first time in my little series of "**Netrunner** around the world" that it is a guest who is writing about **Netrunner** activity in a City Grid or a country instead of a local player. It is also an apology, since the release of this issue has been delayed for three months; the reason for this is my moving from Cologne to Tokyo for at least one-and-a-half years, studying Japanese and (hopefully) writing my Ph. D. thesis. In short, I have been rather busy.

From the TRC list of City Grids, I knew that there were Grids in Tokyo as well as in Sapporo (northern Japan), and I was hoping that I would be able to continue to play **Netrunner** from time to time on the other side of the globe. I contacted Tada-san of Tokyo City Grid and Takano-san from Sapporo; they were very friendly and immediately invited me to join the players of Japan. And so, one Sunday, Tada-san and I met in front of Shinjuku Station (the biggest station in the world, it is said, with more than a million customers each day) and proceeded on to the Hyper Arena, one of the local gamers' haunts. It costs a few yen to be allowed to enter a room with lots of tables, where card players can then indulge themselves.

Maybe there isn't any better place in the world for playing **Netrunner** than Shinjuku. The highrise buildings, neon advertisements and stylish people come right out of *Neuromancer* or *Bladerunner*, and you expect a Trauma Team AV-4 Aerodyne buzzing by overhead any second. Chiba being just next door (30 minutes by subway) also adds a whole new thrill to playing a Loan, since the Chiba goons won't have to go far.

Fortunately, there wasn't any feeling of a Tokyo-Chiba Infighting at the Hyper Arena—quite the contrary: Five enthusiastic players (some of them living in Chiba) showed up, and on another occasion, we were nine in all. It is amazing just how lively the **Netrunner** scene is in a country that hasn't had many shops selling the cards for quite a long time. They have to get almost everything from the U.S. by mail order, and my impression was that people often just do not own a whole lot of cards.

Why hasn't this presence been more widely known to **Netrunner** players around the world? Well, the players of Japan have their *own* **Netrunner** mailing list, in Japanese, of course—most players there are perhaps not that much at home with the English language, and of course it makes sense to communicate in one's mother tongue. The downside is that players from abroad cannot follow the discussion there. Right now, the list sees at least as much traffic as the "big" **Netrunner** mailing list; an automatic program posts the data (with translated card texts) of two randomly selected cards (one Corp, one Runner) to the list each week, so that players can post their comments. It is a really good idea in my opinion.

It is huge fun playing the members of Tokyo City Grid. The atmosphere is quite pleasant (most games start with a little bow towards your opponent), and although many strategies one can encounter there are "international" in a way, playing styles differ in subtle ways. Also imagine my delight when in one game, my opponent installed a Japanese Water Torture! Communication is in Japanese only, but that only helps me with my studies. Far from being "fluent Navaho", my Japanese is slowly improving.

Recently, two players from Sapporo City Grid flew down to Tokyo for a weekend. We had a great Sealed tournament with 12 players, with lots of Blackmail, Glacier, and Rent-I-Con action in my case. There are tough opponents in Japan, and time and again I was really surprised by some of their moves. We even had that rarest of all things at that day: A new player started playing **Netrunner**, buying a starter deck!

The gist of all of this: Though the interview with Neal above paints a gloomy picture of the state of **Netrunner** activity, there are places in the world where it is still pretty much alive.

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